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FINAL THREE VISA BROKERS SENTENCED FOR WIDESPREAD INTERNATIONAL BRIBES-FOR-VISAS SCHEME

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Assistant Attorney General Christopher A. Wray of the Criminal Division and U.S. Attorney McGregor W. Scott of the Eastern District of California announced today that three key "visa brokers" received sentences of 57, 41 and 30 months in prison for their roles in facilitating a bribery and visa fraud scheme involving the unlawful issuance of approximately 200 visas from the U.S. Embassies in Sri Lanka, Fiji and Vietnam.

Judge Garland E. Burrell, Jr., sentenced Vinesh Prasad, 33, of Sacramento, California to 57 months imprisonment; his brother Minesh Prasad, 30, of Sacramento, California to 41 months imprisonment; and Kim Chi Lam, 53, of Gardena, California to 30 months imprisonment. He also ordered the Prasads to forfeit \$75,000 and Lam to forfeit approximately \$40,000 in seized cash. Each defendant was also ordered to serve a three-year term of supervised release following release from imprisonment.

Long N. Lee, 52, a now terminated U.S. State Department Foreign Service Officer and career State Department employee, and her husband, Acey R. Johnson, 34, a former Consular Associate, were previously sentenced to 60 and 63 months imprisonment, respectively, for their leading roles in the scheme.

"The fraud scheme uncovered in this investigation was a direct assault on the integrity of the U.S. visa process," said Assistant Attorney General Wray of the Criminal Division. "The Department of Justice will not hesitate to prosecute cases where government employees and others wrongly enrich themselves at the expense of the public trust."

U.S. Attorney Scott said, "In this era more than ever, it is vital to ensure integrity in the issuance of United States visas. The actions of those involved in this case, including a high ranking U.S. embassy official in Sri Lanka, were reprehensible. I am gratified by the successful collaboration of so many agencies in this investigation, including the Diplomatic Security Service of the United States Department of State, the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force, and other federal and state agencies."

Lee was the Chief Administrative Officer at the U.S. Embassies in Sri Lanka and Fiji from 1997 to 2003, and had previously served as the Consular Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Vietnam between 1995 and 1997. Johnson had worked as a Consular Associate in the U.S. Embassies in Sri Lanka and Fiji between 1997 and 2003. The convicted defendants admitted that Lee agreed to arrange for the issuance of U.S. visas in exchange for bribes as early as 1995.

Both she and Johnson, acting in concert, continued the scheme from 1997 through their arrest in April 2003.

As part of the scheme, "visa brokers" located in Northern Virginia, the greater Sacramento area and the greater Los Angeles area collected bribes from foreign nationals, ordinarily from India or Vietnam, and steered the nationals through the visa application process, including travel to the U.S. Embassies where Lee and Johnson were posted. Lee and/or Johnson then caused visas to be issued to the nationals and later accepted hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribe payments from the brokers. On instructions from Lee and Johnson, the brokers broke bribe payments into transactions under \$10,000 to avoid scrutiny by financial institutions and law enforcement, and then forwarded payments to Lee, Johnson and their family members. Using the bribe payments, Lee and Johnson, among other things, amassed \$350,000 in cash (deposited in various bank accounts or secreted in their Oregon home), sent a series of payments to their children, and acquired and/or maintained two separate properties—a seaside home in Port Orford, Oregon, and a vacation home in Bailey, Colorado.

Vinesh Prasad was a leader of the Sacramento-area visa brokers, who arranged for numerous foreign nationals, primarily from India, to pay bribes in exchange for visas. Kim Chi Lam was similarly one of the primary organizers of the Vietnamese nationals who paid bribes in exchange for visas.

A total of 10 defendants have been convicted in the case. Five other visa broker defendants were previously sentenced: Narinderjit Singh Bhullar, 40, of Sacramento, California to 33 months in prison; Ramesh K. Jaisingh, 57, of Fairfax, Virginia to 21 months; Rachhpal Singh, 32, of Newark, California to 20 months; Rajwant S. Virk, 47, of Herndon, Virginia to 15 months; and Phuongh Hien Lam Trinh, 35, of Gardena, California, to three years probation. An eleventh defendant is a fugitive.

The case is being prosecuted in U.S. District Court in Sacramento by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Benjamin B. Wagner and S. Robert Tice-Raskin and by Trial Attorney Noah D. Bookbinder of the Public Integrity Section, headed by Noel L. Hillman, Chief. It is the product of an extensive investigation conducted by the Diplomatic Security Service of the U.S. Department of State, and by agents with the FBI and several other state and federal agencies associated with the Joint Terrorism Task Force for the Eastern District of California, including the California Bureau of Investigation, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, and the Bureau of Immigration Control and Enforcement of the Department of Homeland Security. Sri Lankan law enforcement authorities also provided assistance in the investigation.

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